

# **The Story of The Thomas Cousins And how we came to be.....**

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**By: Anna Frances Reistle Nicely  
Summer 2020**



## Our Generations

These are the results of my DNA test through Family Tree DNA. The "promotion" on this included a year of research sponsored by the Mormon's of Utah. Being female, it is traced through my Mother, Helen.

1. Anna Frances Reistle ( substitute your name here)
  2. Helen Marie Thomas ( her Mother) ( substitute Helen, Fred or Jim here)
  3. Alphonso Lyons Thomas, Jr. ( Helen's Father)( follow this chart as yours)
  4. Elizabeth Smallwood Downer Thomas ( Alphonso's Mother)
  5. Mary Smallwood Rulon Downer ( Elizabeth's Mother)
  6. John Mahomat Rul on (Mary's Father)
  7. John Rulon, Sr. ( John M's Father)
  8. Henry Rulon ( John, Sr.'s Father)
  9. David Cooper Rulon ( Henry's Father)
  10. Pierre Ruel Rulon ( David's Father)    Margrietje Paulding Rulon ( David's Mother)
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| b. 1680 LaTremblade, France<br>d. July 18, 1741 Ulster, NY | b. 1681 Monmouth, NJ<br>d. 1714 Monmouth, NJ |
|--|--|
11. Exercise Allen Rulon ( Pierre and Margrietje's daughter in law)  
 b. October 18, 1705    d. March 29, 1779  
 her parents are Henry Allen and Hannah Corlies Allen

now it jumps to:

13. Henriette Auger Corliez (1530-1627)
  14. Pierre Corliez (Henriette's Father) 1497-1551)
  15. Louise Bascom Corliez ( Pierre's Mother) 1469-1520)
  16. Giulaiume Bascom, Jr. (1443-1511) and Adelaide Chabane de Bascom (Louise's parents)
  17. Amedei Daniel... Lord of Des Vres Cambria Nord Nord-Pas-de Calais France
  18. Amedei was Father to
19. PHILLIPO DANIEL Thrice Noble and Magnificent and Powerful Prince  
 b. 1453    d. 1488
  19. He married Agnetta Daniel and they were parents to Andre Daniel Noble of St. Omar

This is the end of the research I have for us, but..... NO DOUBT..... we have "royal French Blood" in us!!



REV. ARTHUR DOWNER (No. 2458).

## **Rev. Arthur Downer**

He has the distinction of having founded a new branch of the Downer family in this country, and of having a town named in his honor. His father was John Downer born in Ireland about 1780. His grandfather was Charles Downer, born about 1755, somewhere in Ireland, and came to Drumbess in the Parish of Killeshandra, years before the rebellion of 1798. The ancestors to this branch of Downers were intense Loyalists and escaped from England in Cromwell's time and found refuge in Ireland.

John Downer was a rigid churchman and also a member of the Primitive Wesleyan Church. He had the stern spirit of those early days and trained his children accordingly. He personally gave them the rudiments of a secular education ( the nearest school being 2 miles away)and was careful to instill into their minds religious truths. There is, in this family a tradition that some of its member went to America at an early time, but where is not known.

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Influenced by letters received from friends of his Mother, in Philadelphia, Arthur Downer embarked from Ireland in the packet ship J.P.Whitney on May 19, 1849. He landed in Philadelphia on July 7. He first found employment in a wholesale store on Second Street ,but it was not to his liking. In the spring of 1850 he crossed the Delaware into NJ and hired out to a Gloucester County farmer at \$9.50 per month. Afterwards, in 1858, he began farming on his own account and ran into debt for fifty acres of wild, unimproved forest land. It was, he said " a moral and physical desolation" ,but he lived there 10 years, clearing the lands and cultivating the soil. In 1870 a railroad was surveyed through the section and the line laid out, going directly through the town of Downer.



In 1873 the Jay Cooke Financial crisis nearly ruined him, but providentially a valuable bed of silicate sand was just then found on his farm, which has ever since continued to be a source of unfailing revenue. From it is taken over two thousand tons a month on which Mr. Downer's personal royalty is ten cents a ton, giving him a net income of more than \$ 200 monthly from this source alone. The sand is washed by machinery and shipped in car lots to various points, where it is used in the manufacture of glass and steel. The future of Downer, NJ seems to be assured and its founder is proud of the fact that it has no saloon. The village itself, with its Downer name, is a monument to the man back of it, but no account of him would be complete without reference to the religious side of his life. One of his first acts in coming to Gloucester County was to connect himself to the Harrisonville M.E. Church, and since that time has been active in Christian work. He soon organized a Sunday School in his house and gathered in his neighbor's children for religious instruction. In 1868 he bought an adjoining block of 48 acres of land on which he selected a site for a beautiful church. This however was not built until 1886. Mr. Downer never sought church preferment, but it has come to him unsolicited. In 1866 "was licensed to exhort" and five years later he received a "preacher's license". In 1889 he was ordained a Deacon, and in 1895 ordained an Elder, by Bishop Merritt. The church and district school at Downer owe their existence to him. He not only donated the land on which they stand, but it was chiefly by his aid that the buildings were erected. He preaches at neighboring places as he may be needed, and is grateful for the opportunity. Now in his declining years he possesses the respect of his neighbors and recognizes the leadings of an over-ruling Providence. He can look back with satisfaction on a well-spent life and rejoice that he has been able to accomplish so much for the good of the community where God has placed him.

This information is taken from a book... "The Downers of America" A Genealogical Record

By David R Downer Newark, NJ 1900

## Downer... History of Monroe Township

Arthur Downer and his wife Mary arrived in 1858.

An Indian Burial Ground was present as was an indication of cultivation of the fields. Crops were grown next to the public road ( presently Rt. 322) Peach trees were also raised and although they bore rather feebly on one occasion it is said the crop of peaches were so large they resembled cantaloupes. Apple trees were also found in the area.

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In 1864 residents of Downer voted for Abraham Lincoln and were driven to the poles by Arthur Downer himself.

The Downer house was a typical house of the time consisting of two rooms downstairs and three upstairs. They were used for many reasons in addition to living quarters. Some were used for storage, granary, etc. and the hams were stored in the fireplace.

By 1871 the population had grown sufficiently large to require the need of a school. As in other hamlets in the area, the school was initially built for children and later became the property of the church. The school became part of the Downer UM Church and was used as a Social Hall.

In 1875 the potato bug infested their crops and left them in seriously difficulty so they turned to other endeavors. John, the son, had discovered yellow sand in the area, but his father because Arthur paid little attention to this. Later, the burial of a colt in the sand proved to be eventful because it was tested and found to be good for the glass industry. Delivery of the sand was first made by horse drawn wagon and later by rail on the Williamstown and Delaware River Railroad. A siding was placed at the Fries Mill Road to take advantage of the cheap rail rates. The name formerly used by this area was Whitneyville and was shortened to Whitney. When the Post Office was built the name was changed to Downer.

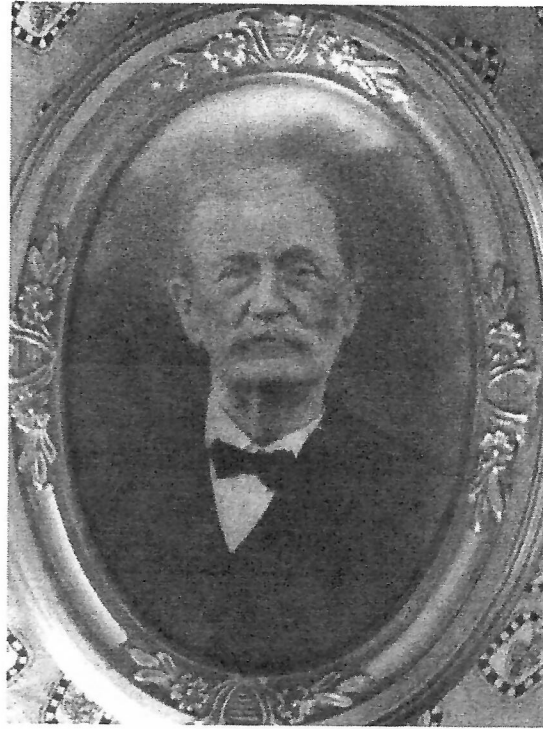
As in all the surrounding areas, the Methodist Church played an important part. It began with the efforts of Mary and Arthur Downer, who after attending a Camp Meeting felt the need to have their neighbors experience "Sanctification", as they called it. Revivals started at " the corner house". Sunday School was conducted in the Downer Homestead. Church services were attended in Williamstown. Realizing that with growth, a new permanent church was needed... one was built. The original burnt, but was quickly replaced.



Downer.



**Alphonso Lyon Thomas Sr.**



**Elizabeth "Lizzy" Smallwood Downer Thomas**



## **The Story of Alphonso and Elizabeth**

**It all started with Benjamin Smallwood ( 1775-1832) and Elizabeth Cooper ( 1778-1832) ..... Their son John Charles Smallwood ( 1797-1878) and his wife Mary Dunham (1803- 1874)( were married on April 17, 1833). Ten years later their daughter Mary Smallwood was born. (1832- 1899). Mary met Samuel Goldsmith Thomas ( 1826- 1870) and their son was Alphonso Lyons Thomas, Sr ( 1856-1920). Our Great Grandfather!**

**Meanwhile... it started again with Benjamin Smallwood and Elizabeth Cooper. Their daughter Sybillia Cooper Smallwood ( 1803-1883) married John Rulon, Jr. ( 1802-1877) on October 7, 1824. Their daughter Mary Smallwood Rulon ( 1834-1899) married Arthur Downer ( 1829-1917) on May 13, 1853. Their fourth child and only surviving daughter was Elizabeth Smallwood Downer ( 1861-1946) Our Great Grandmother!!**

**Alphonso, Sr. 's Mother and Elizabeth's Mother were cousins. Elizabeth was born and raised in Downer. Alphonso's Mother became a widow and with several young sons went to work, with her boys, in a mill in Delaware. MY story goes like this.....**

**Mary Downer wrote to her cousin Mary Thomas and insisted she move to Downer, NJ with her boys. Rather than working in the mill they could work on the Downer's farm, where the boys could attend the Downer school, and Church. Alphonso was the oldest... and as fate would have it... fell in love with the younger( 5 years) Elizabeth Downer. And so our story begins! Both Mary Downer and Mary Thomas died the same year (1899) and both are buried in the Downer Cemetery.**

**And that's how the "Thomas Clan" began for us!**

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This is the family home of Alphonso Lyons Thomas, Sr. and Elizabeth Downer Thomas. It looks quite different now, as it was purchased by Fritz Hoffman after the GGparents moved to 89E. Barber Ave, Woodbury, NJ. Fritz moved it back from 322 and tore off the back shed and bricked the exterior. All ~~six~~ of the Thomas children were born and raised here. It is currently for sale, and is located on the corner of 322 and Fries Mill Rd. It is only one of two original houses in Downer to survive. The other one is next to the Downer UM Church and is used as a Sunday School.



*dated 1916*

The railroad played an important part in the development of the hamlet of Downer. Not only for shipping the sand to the glassworks and steel industry, but for produce and people transportation. The railroad is not there anymore, but the state of NJ has converted the original railroad bed to the "Rails to Trails" project. It runs from Williamstown to Elmer.



1936  
The house being  
moved



1937-38



1981 (Present)





Students at Downer School 1898

Children of Alphonso Thomas, Sr.  
and Elizabeth Downer Thomas



#4 Laura Thomas- age 10

#23 Maggie Thomas- age 13

#24 Annie Thomas- age 17

#33 Edwin Thomas- age 8

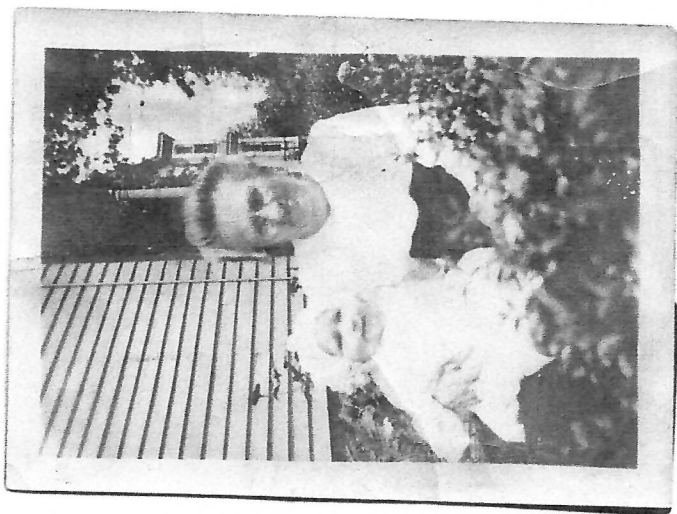
#34 Alphonso Thomas, Jr - age 5

missing- Arthur Thomas - age 16





Edwin Margaret Alphonso, Jr. Anna Laura Arthur  
Alphonso, Sr. Elizabeth

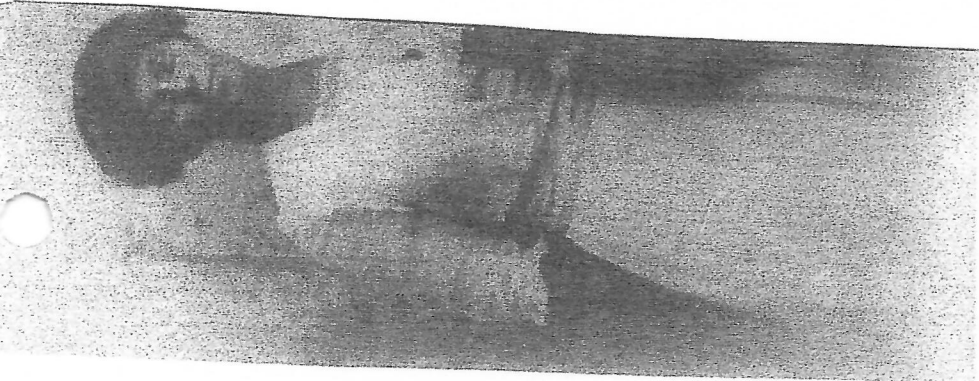


Baby - Helen Marie Thomas



Elizabeth Downer Thomas

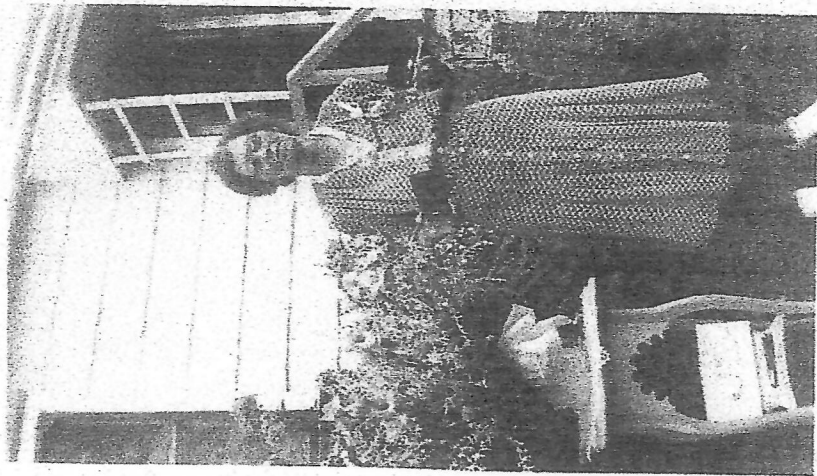




About 1898



Aunt Laura      Aunt Nan  
Jack Reistle  
1969 This was taken  
1 month before  
Aunt Nan passed.



1946

Aunt Nan worked at  
Campbell's Soup- this was  
her retirement.

Annie Laurie  
"Aunt Nan"





Elizabeth Downer  
Thomas

Carolyn  
Thomas

Edwin Thomas

We traveled to Detroit to visit Aunt Irma and Uncle Arthur. John cut the fringe off an antique chair and Ann slammed the bathroom door so hard the ceiling caved in! ☺



Arthur  
Thomas

Anna  
Reistle  
age 4

John  
Reistle  
age 2

Leo  
Reistle



Irma and Arthur Thomas

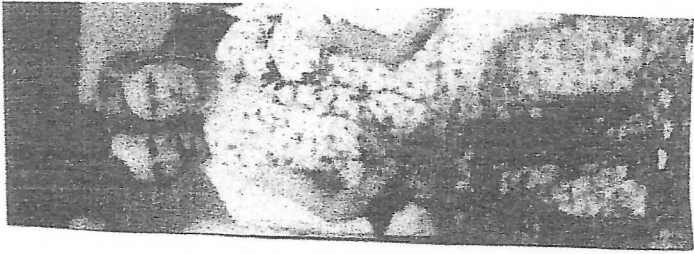
THOMAS—At his late residence 120 Allen St., Swedesboro, N. J., on May 13, 1956, Arthur D., husband of Irma R., aged 73 years.  
Relatives and friends are invited to attend the funeral services on Wednesday, May 16 at 2 P. M. at Downer M. E. Church.  
Interment Downer M. E. Cemetery.  
Friends may call Tuesday evening at the S. Carlton Coles Funeral Home, 518 Kings Highway, Swedesboro, N. J., 4-14-26

when they moved from Detroit they lived in the upstairs apt. at 120 Allen St. Swedesboro





Aunt Laura Watson



Aunt Laura and Aunt Nan  
lived at 89 E. Barber Ave  
Woodbury NJ

It was the family home after  
the Thomas family moved from  
Downer.

Leon (stepson)



Evelyn

Arthur

Margaret Thomas Johnson

b. March 1, 1885

d. July 16, 1935 age 50

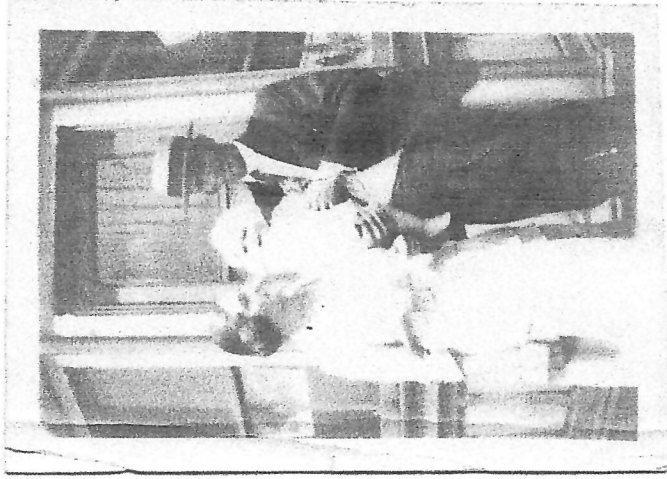
Margaret is buried in Woodstown

Margaret married George Johnson, an Irishman from Ireland who had a 10 yr. old son, Leon.

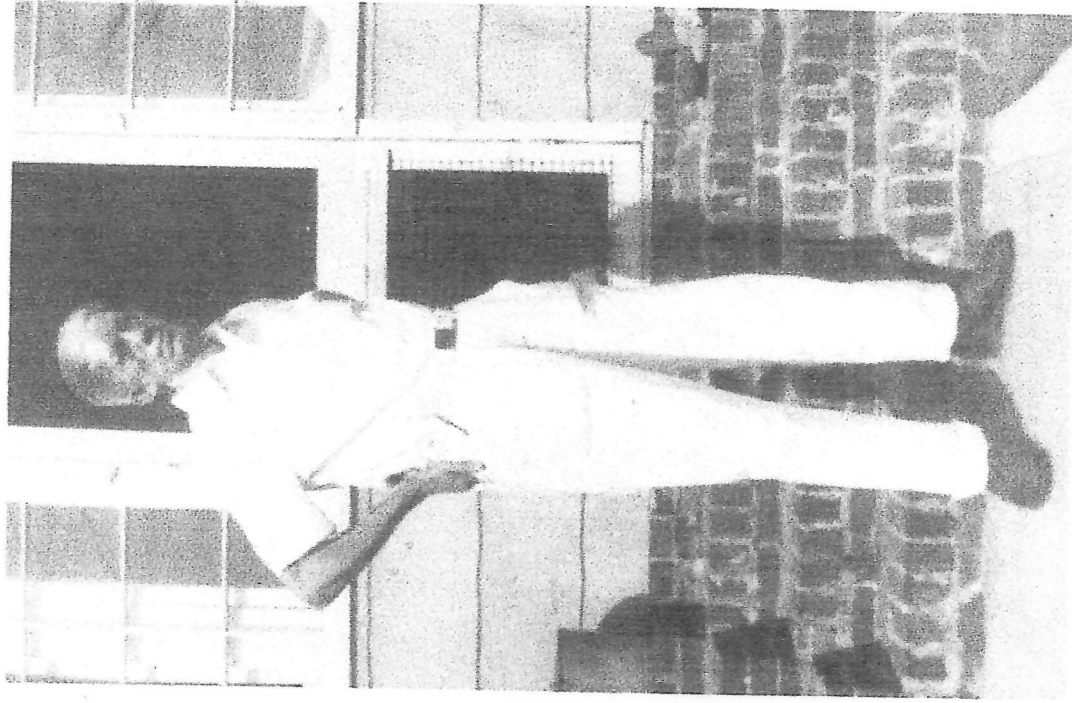
Alphonso Jr. and Anna Zane were married in their home in Pennsgrove, Christmas Eve 1920.



Dad 1945



1923 Brooklyn  
Bridge  
Anna, Alphonso  
and  
Helen Marie



Dad

Alphonso Lyons Thomas, Jr. 120 Allen St.

**ALPHONSO L. THOMAS**  
Alphonso L. Thomas, 63, of 120 Allen St., Swedesboro, died Saturday.

Mr. Thomas was an employee of the Del Monte Canning Co. since 1932 and resided in Swedesboro for the past 24 years. He was a member of the Downer Methodist Church.

He is survived by his wife, Anna B.; three daughters, Mrs. Helen Reistle and Misses Shirley and Merry Thomas, all of Swedesboro; two sons, Fred R., of Norfolk Va., and James R., of Camden; a brother, Edwin W., of Lewistown, Pa.; two sisters, Miss Anna L. Thomas and Mrs. Laura M. Watson, of Woodbury, and four grandchildren.

Services will be held Tuesday at 2 P. M. from the Coles Funeral Home, 518 Kings Highway, Swedesboro, where friends also may call this evening. Burial will be in Downer Methodist Cemetery.



Elwood S. Watson	Edwin Thomas	Arthur Thomas	Alphonso Thomas				
Laura Watson		Caroline Thomas	Irma Thomas	Anna Thomas	Leon Johnson		
Grandpop holding Ruth Watson	Elizabeth Thomas	Grandma	Evelyn Johnson	Margaret Johnson	Arthur Johnson	George Johnson	Edith Watson in front
						Everett Watson	

## The Six Thomas Siblings and Their Children

1. Annie Laurie ( b. July 18, 1881) Our beloved Aunt Nan never married or had any children but was a loving God Mother to Helen Thomas and Anna Reistle and adored her many nieces and nephews.
2. Arthur (b. June 29, 1882) He married Irma ( from Detroit, Michigan) and they had no children.  
He was the only Thomas son to serve in WWI.
3. Margaret ( b. March 1, 1885) She married George Johnson and they had two children.  
Arthur... born March 30, 1910  
Evelyn... born June 14, 1913
4. Laura ( b. Feb 27, 1888) She married Elwood Watson and they had four children.  
Everett..., born July 2, 1910  
Edith.... Born July 8, 1912  
Ruth...born May 7, 1916  
Jean...born Oct 28, 1927
5. Edwin ( b. Dec 20, 1890) He married Caroline and they had two children  
Elizabeth Dortha... b. July 8, 1912  
Edwin, Jr. ...b. Aug 3, 1920
6. Alphonso, Jr. (b. Dec 23, 1894) He married Anna and they had three children  
Helen Marie...b. Nov 14, 1921  
Fred Richard...b. Oct 8, 1923  
James Robert... b. July 6, 1929



(196-?) Franklin Twp. Sentinel

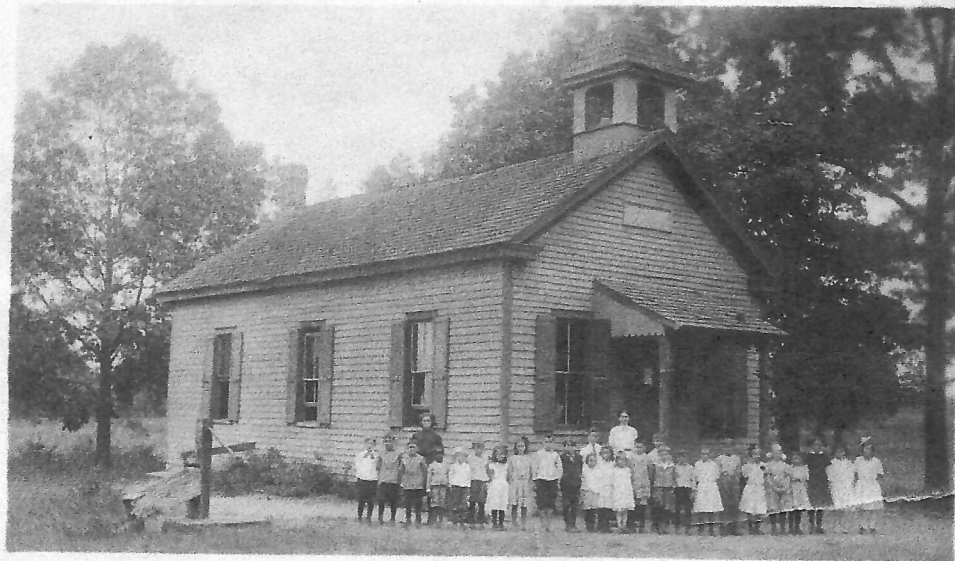
## WAY BACK WHEN...

By Herbert Bernstein

### The Stone Church At Whitneyville



Pictures dated 1913



PUBLIC SCHOOL, DOWNER, N.J.

treelined highway.

The rusty iron-bars turn out to be tracks of a once busy, but long since discarded Railroad,

the branch known as the Williamstown - Delaware River Railroad. And the few frame buildings still standing represent the center of a mid-nineteenth century community - Whitneyville.

It was on December 1, 1858 when Arthur Downer and his wife Mary arrived at these clearings and swamplands in the middle of nowhere. His purchase of sixty acres of land near the Whitney Brothers Glass Works of Glassboro, were to provide a livelihood for many families in years to come.

The Downers first engaged in agriculture and together with other early settlers succeeded in making a fair living until the recently imported potato bug destroyed all their crop. Lean years followed, but out of disaster rose the legendary phoenix. In 1875, while burying a valuable horse, John R. Downer noticed the white sand prevailing in these parts and took samples of it to the Glass Works.

Prosperity came back to the small community when the sand proved to be suitable for the manufacturing of glass. A Railroad siding was built and even a postoffice established, the latter being responsible for the name under which the location is known to us today.

Originally named Whitneyville, the Railroad sidings' identification was abbreviated to Whitney shortly thereafter. On second thought, the railroad superintendent was afraid that Whitney could be confused with a station by the name of Whittings and suggested that the postoffice stop changes its name to Downer.

A small, beautiful stone church proudly displays the inscription "Downer Methodist Church", perpetuating the founders' name for all times to come. Since 1866 services have been held in this extraordinary Gothic structure, erected entirely out of native sand. A small grave yard holds the remains of many of the hamlets' early settlers, many of which can be seen in the photograph at the top of this column.

Mailed on November 17, 1913, the card carries the Downer post-

# Downer Supplies Sand For Steel Production

DOWNER—Nestled halfway between Glassboro and Williamstown lies the tiny village of Downer, an area which time seems to have by passed almost entirely in its flight from the 19th to the 20th century.

There is, of course, all the conveniences of modern day living for its 45 residents, but its layout and architecture are reminiscent of the 1800's when it was first settled.

When Arthur Downer and his wife, Mary Smallwood Rulon, whom he married in 1855, purchased 60 acres of what was then wild timberland, there were signs of former habitation. "Little old fields, bits of brick, the relics of implements and apple orchards" his son, John, wrote in the history of the area. Such was the settlement's beginnings.

## Had Many Names

The area around Downer had been known by many names, such as Swope Field, Dilk's Field and Whitneyville, which was later shortened to Whitney and then to Downer, when a post office was established there.

The town is located on Rt. 222 on the northwest boundary of Monroe Township.

William Downer, a son of the original settler, once wrote "the neighbors lived in log cabins and carried on woodcraft to make a living." Others lived in what he called "crude frame houses" and were farmers.

By 1871 the population of the little village had grown enough to require a school. It still stands

## Sand Aids Glass Making

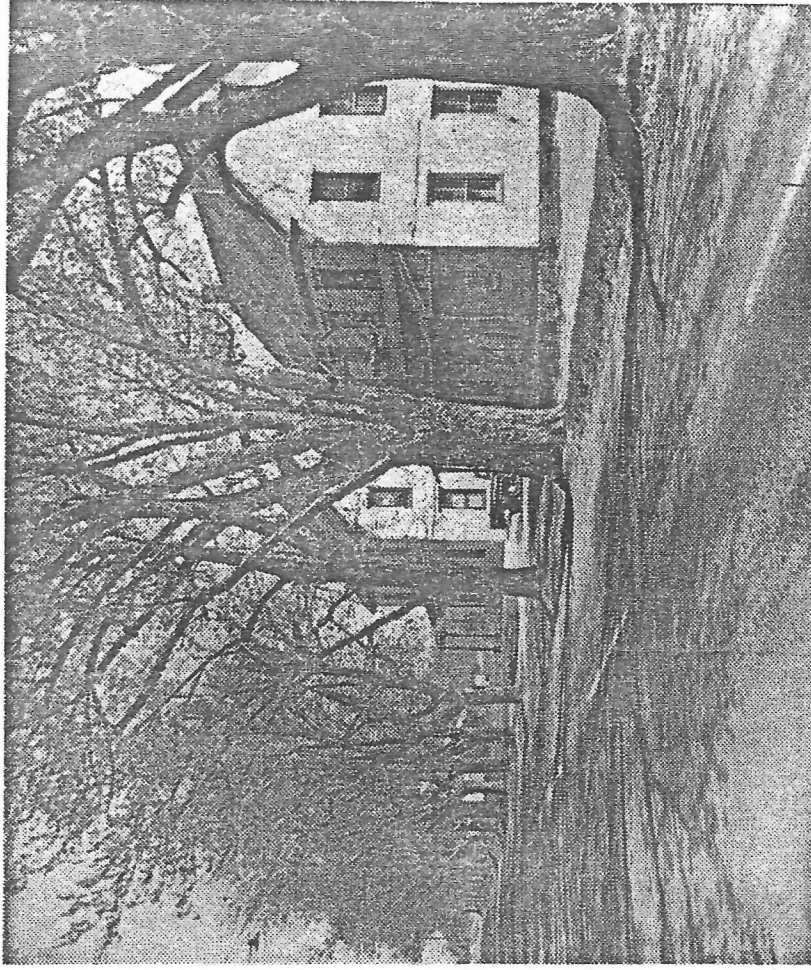
The discovery of yellow and white sand, suitable for glass making, began a thriving mining operation in Downer in the latter part of the 19th century. The sand was hauled to the glass mills in Glassboro by horse-drawn carts until 1884 when the Williamstown and Delaware River Railroad began operation.

A siding was placed at the Fries Mill rd., and the name of the town was changed from Whitneyville to Whitney.

In 1890 William Downer began looking for other markets for the sand and found it was useful in steel making. By 1919 glass sand mining had been completely replaced by the steel sand production, which is still carried on today.

The area is also productive fruit growing country. In 1863 John Downer wrote of a peach tree which produced a fruit on occasion "so large I took it to be a small canteloupe someone had thrown there."

The history of Downer was written by John Rulon Downer, son of the original settler, Arthur and his wife, Mary.



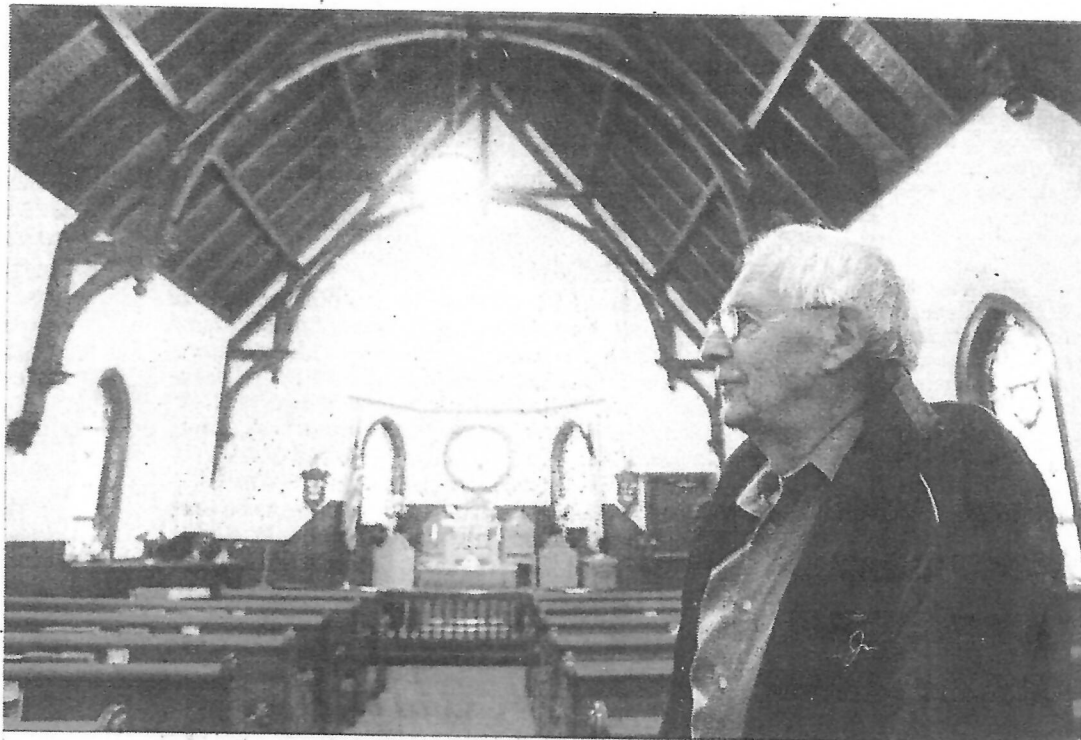
—Courier-Post Photo by Gary L. Shivers

SPREADING maple trees line the main street of Downer, giving the wood frame homes of the small community an air of calm antiquity. Once called Whitneyville, the town is much the same as it was when first settled in the early 1800s.

5-17-64

This is looking toward Rt. 322  
The first house on the right is gone.  
The second house is still standing  
and is used as the Sunday School.  
The church is slightly visible beyond in  
the trees





Staff photo by Lori M. Nichols

Rev. Glenn Chaplin, pastor of the Downer Methodist Church in Williamstown, speaks about the process of getting the church on the state and national historical registries.

## MONROE TOWNSHIP

# HISTORY IN THE MAKING

## Area church added to National Register of sites

By Christina Paciolla

[cpaciolla@sjnewsco.com](mailto:cpaciolla@sjnewsco.com)

MONROE TWP. — The Downer Methodist Episcopal Church on Fries Mill Road has made its way into the record books. The small Gothic Revival building is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Rev. Glenn Chaplin said his congregation is "really excited."

Four years ago, a previous pastor talked about nominating the unique structure for the register, but not much came of it, Chaplin said. When Chaplin took over about a year ago, it was apparent that the congregation — only about 20 people in this tiny church — felt that their church deserved to be listed.

"I came on the scene last year and the people said, 'Will you follow suit?'" Chaplin recalled.

In June, Chaplin completed the nomination process for the historic registry. About two weeks ago, he received notice that the church had been chosen.

The process usually takes about a year, Chaplin said.

(See CHURCH, Page A-5)



The Downer Methodist Church in Williamstown is now on the state and national historical registries.

## Church: Joins National Register

(Continued from Page A-1)

"Evidently, it's something so unique that the [historic] commission wanted to deal with it right away," Chaplin said.

The Downer Methodist Episcopal Church was originally built in 1886 but was largely rebuilt in 1900. Records indicate that a fire destroyed most of the building around 1899. All of the church's wooden components were reconstructed after the fire.

The Gothic Revival style is apparent not only inside the structure but outside as well. Its bell tower, open-truss ceiling, steep gable roofs, plain plaster walls, and lancet-arched windows and doors — along with stained glass windows, carved pew encaps, wainscoting and the incorporation of two basic religious symbols into the architecture — met the criteria for one of the four categories of historic places recognized by the national register: The architectural category.

Apparently, the wood used in the building is from a Virginia pine called a two-leaf pine, said Chaplin.

"It was very rare then and doesn't even exist now," Chaplin explained.

The stone used for the church is also significant, with strong local ties to the area during the 1800s. It's the same stone used to build the Hollybush Mansion in Glassboro — South Jersey ironstone from a local quarry along the Chestnut Branch. The Whitney family who built the Hollybush Mansion were influential local residents who owned a lot of land and businesses in the area. Arthur Downer, the church's namesake, was said to have provided much of the sand for Whitney's glassmaking factories.

Before 1935, church records are not available. According to Chaplin, Downer's memoirs state that the church was rebuilt at a cost of \$2,800. After Downer went away for a few years, he returned to find the church closed. He made it his mission to reopen the building.

The church was incorporated in 1942 with Downer as a trustee. Various construction adjustments were made to the building over the years such as steeple repairs in the 1950s, the installation of a cross on the bell tower in the 1960s and a ramp in the 1980s.

On a good Sunday, Chaplin said, about 35 people

will be in attendance for the 10 a.m. service. Although the church has no offices or bathrooms, a house next to the church is used for Sunday school.

Currently, there are no children in the congregation.

In a few years, the church will celebrate its 125th year, and Chaplin hopes to help plan that celebration.

Also, the minister said he is thinking about adding another building, a place to hold dinners or have fellowship. But for now, he's just excited about the church's newest accomplishment.

A listing on the National Register protects the church from public encroachment or road expansion — a possibility on busy Fries Mill Road. Chaplin hopes to have a bronze highway marker installed to educate motorists about the building and spread the word about its historic status.

Technically, the minister and his wife were retired when he was asked to serve the small congregation at Downer.

"It's been interesting," he observed. "I don't know what I'd do if I didn't do this."

# Downer Methodist celebrates 100 years

MONROE TWP. — The Downer United Methodist Church will celebrate its 100th Anniversary on Sunday with a special worship service in the morning, and afternoon activities scheduled at the Wilson Lake Memorial Park Pavilion. Bishop Neil L. Irons, of the New Jersey Area, The United Methodist Church, will be preaching at the 9:45 a.m. service; Jac Madson, Director of Religious Music at McGuire AFB, Wrightstown, will be the guest soloist.

Following a dinner-by-reservation-only, the Rev. John L. Ewing, Southwest District Superintendent will lead a Bible Study in Hebrews 11, 12 and 13. At 2:45, time has been set aside for personal reminiscences by former members and pastors, as well as personal testimonies.

At 3:45, a concert will be presented by "Heaven's Echoes", a team of teenagers from the Northern Burlington County area, under the direction of Jac Madson.

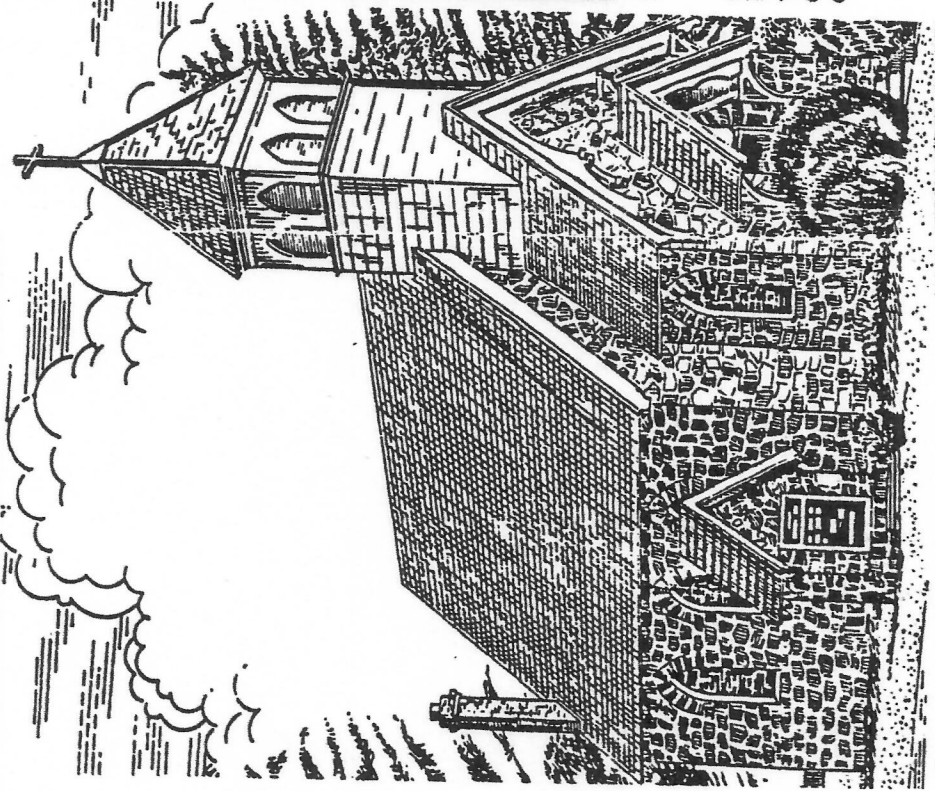
At approximately 4:30 p.m., The Rev. David Bailey, Director of Ranch Hope in Alloway, will bring the celebration to a close with an evangelistic message.

The little brownstone church, as well as the community which surrounds it, was named for Arthur Downer, who immigrated to America in 1849. He eventually established a silica-mining business.

In 1860 he and his wife, Mary

Downer United Methodist Church parishoners have planned a full day of activities to celebrate the church's 100th anniversary. Monroe Council passed a proclamation making Oct. 12 Downer United Methodist Church Day in the township.

Smallwood Rulon, organized the first Sunday school. When the community had its own public school, church services were held in it until the church was built in 1886.



Rev. John L. Ewing

In December of 1899, the church was gutted by a fire that began in a defective flue, but within a year it was rebuilt and dedicated free of debt at a cost of only \$2,800!



Bishop Neil L. Irons

The congregation that has constituted the Downer church has always been a small one, but it is no exaggeration that their motto has been "The Little Church With The Big Welcome."